

Problema ng Makata sa Panahon ng Terorismo /The Problem of the Poet in a Time of Terrorism

E. SAN JUAN, JR.

Introduction

E. San Juan, Jr., previously a fellow at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University, is an internationally renowned Filipino literary scholar, cultural critic and public intellectual whose large body of work (over forty books and two hundred articles) in the fields of English, Ethnic Studies, and Comparative Literature has been translated into Chinese, Russian, French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Japanese. The recipient of numerous awards including Outstanding Book Awards from the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights in the United States (1992 and 2001), the National Book Award in Cultural Studies from the Association for Asian American Studies (1993), and the Centennial Award for Achievement in Literature from the Cultural Center of the Philippines (1999), San Juan is recognized by literary and cultural theorist Fredric Jameson for his “remarkable commitment to literature and culture as vital areas of contemporary social life.”

“global war on terror” on Philippine society, where forms of dissent are criminalized and thousands have been brutally silenced by extrajudicial violence, San Juan’s poem in Filipino and English titled *Problema ng*

Makata sa Panahon ng Terorismo/The Problem of the Poet in an Age of Terror sheds light on the responsibility of the exiled Filipino writer/artist/poet in our post 9/11 era. It is within the context of U.S.-Philippine colonial and neocolonial relations (the Philippines became a U.S. colony in 1898) that the Filipino poet discovers how the act of reclaiming a Filipino national language is simultaneously an act of claiming freedom—the right to self determination. This decolonizing aesthetic of San Juan’s poem in the Filipino language—in form and content—contributes to the unique unfolding of Philippine subaltern struggle within the realm of a “Filipino praxis of alter/native writing.”

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Problema ng Makata sa Panahon ng Terorismo

Nangungulila Tila luho’t karangyaan

Habang patuloy ang kabuktutan kasamaan
Terorismo ng Estadong neokolonyal Dahas ng militar at pulis

Patuloy ang pandurukot pagpaslang
Ilan libong biktima ng Oplan Bantay Laya—di na mabilang

Kamakailan 57 biktima ng masaker sa Maguindanao

Pinagbabaril ang mga mukha't katawan
Nilapastangan pa ang maselang bahagi ng mga babaeng pinatay

Wala na bang hiya Wala na bang dignidad ang taumbayan?

Karumal-dumal Kahindik-hindik Nakaririmarim Kasuklam-suklam

Pagkatapos ng Auschwitz Buchenwald Intramuros
Barbaridad ng mga pasistang Aleman at Hapon
Sampu ng mga namatay sa Hiroshima at Nagasaki

Payo ni Theodore Adorno, pantas sa sining at pilosopiya,
Wala na'ng kabuluhan ang sining at tula—
Ang tutula pa, talagang tulala!

Ngunit lahat ba'y sakop na ng politika ng oportunismo't dahas ng Estado?
Ng gahasa't pangungulimbat?

Kasama, pwede ba'ng lumihis sa linyadong programa at paradigma?

Pwede ba'ng ipakawalan ang isang buntong-hininga
Pagtutol sa kabuktutang umiiral?

Habang pinakikiramdaman ang ngiti sa matang pumilantik
Hinagka't sumimsim

Saglit lamang

Luwalhating kay tamis tumutusok sumisirit
Saglit lang

Nanuot sa bawat himaymay tumagos lubos labis
Saglit lang

Nangalisag sa bangis ng kalmot at kagat kurot ngatngat
Saglit lamang

Sagad-sagad sumisidhing labis lubos namumuro
Saglit lang

Umabot sa kasukdulang putok ng nasa't pananabik
Pagkatapos
Lumbay ng paalam hapis sa pagkaalam

Minsan lamang tumuturok ang salagimsim

Kaluluwa'y nagkabuhol-buhol sa braso't binti
Sa lalamunan sugat na kay hapdi

Kusang-loob na pagtatalik mula sa paraisong
Bagamat walang kamataya'y tinalikdan

Saglit lamang

Ay naku, muling hagkan

Apoy ng halik walang taros walang awa kung saan-saan

Walang hinto walang wakas walang katapusan

The Problem of the Poet in a Time of Terrorism

[Translated from the original Filipino by the Author]

Mourning alone This looks like ostentatious luxury

While wickedness obscenities continue

Terrorism of the neocolonial Sate Violence by the police and
military

Forced “disappearances” and extra-judicial murders continue

So many victims of the regime’s Oplan Bantay Laya—
impossible to count

Recently, 57 victims in the Maguindanao massacre

Their faces and bodies mutilated by gunfire

Even the genitals of women slain were not spared

Do Filipinos still have any shame any dignity?

Terrible atrocities Horrendous

After Auschwitz Buchenwald Intramuros

Theodore Adorno, sage of art and philosophy, counseled us:

Poetry is useless, worthless—

He who dares to declaim an ode is an imbecile!

But is everything dominated by the politics of opportunism and
the State's barbarism? By rape and plunder?

Comrade, may I be permitted to deviate from the party line?
May I release a sigh from the heart
In protest against the horrors prevailing?
While intuiting the smile from eyes flicking
Embraced and sucked
For only an instant

Bliss so intense hissing
For only an instant

Penetrating to every fiber of the flesh to the bone reaching
beyond
For only an instant

Hair bristling ferocious scratch and bite
For only an instant

Up to the edge seething beyond over-reaching
For only an instant

Mounting to the climax flesh's desire exploding
Grief at goodbye to our knowing each other

Once only this premonition
Souls knotted together limbs and arms entwining

In the throat how bitter and painful

Without any intent this coupling from a paradise
Refused despite intimations of immortality

Only for an instant

Ay god, embracing you again
Fire from kisses without pity without mercy everywhere
Seeking endless